

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 /059 W  
-----102802 081703Z /64

R 081631Z DEC 77  
FM AMCONSUL VANCOUVER  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3901  
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
ALL CANADIAN POSTS POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VANCOUVER 01197

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, CA  
SUBJECT: BRITISH COLUMBIA VIEWS ON QUEBEC SEPARATISM:  
QUARTERLY UPDATE

REF: (A) VANCOUVER 941 (B) VANCOUVER 966 (C) VANCOUVER 984

1. SUMMARY. BRITISH COLUMBIANS ARE INCREASINGLY SKEPTICAL THAT THE TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT IS ADEQUATELY COPING NOT ONLY WITH THE QUEBEC SEPARATIST THREAT BUT WITH THE PARLOUS ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE COUNTRY. LITTLE IS HEARD HERE ABOUT THE NATIONAL UNITY TASK FORCE OR THE IDEA OF A UNITY REFERENDUM, ALTHOUGH MOST BRITISH COLUMBIANS WOULD NOT CONCEDE THAT SEPARATION IS AN ISSUE TO BE DECIDED SOLELY BY QUEBECERS. PREMIER BENNETT, WITH LITTLE SUPPORT, CONTINUES TO PROPOUND THAT THE QUEBEC ISSUE CAN BEST BE MET ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT AND PROPOSES A COMPULSORY NATIONAL ECONOMIC PLANNING PROCESS WHICH HE BELIEVES EVEN QUEBEC WOULD SUPPORT IN ITS OWN SELF INTEREST. B.C. LIBERAL LEADER GIBSON RECENTLY STATED THAT THE POTENTIAL FOR QUEBEC'S SECESSION IS VERY REAL. END SUMMARY.

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2. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN NO DIMINUTION IN THE COMMITMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIANS TO NATIONAL UNITY WITHIN CONFEDERATION, THE PARLOUS STATE OF THE ECONOMY (EVEN THOUGH B.C. IS DOING CONSIDERABLY BETTER THAN MOST PROVINCES) AND THE QUALITY OF THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ARE RECEIVING THE ATTENTION OF B.C. OPINION-MAKERS. CITING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S SEEMING INABILITY TO REDUCE

UNEMPLOYMENT, CHECK INFLATION AND SPUR ECONOMIC GROWTH, CONTROL RCMP ACTIVITIES, AND COMBAT THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT SEPARATIST THREAT, VANCOUVER PRESS EDITORIALS SUGGEST ALMOST WEEKLY THAT PM TRUDEAU'S LIBERAL GOVERNMENT IS "CLEARLY FALLING APART AT THE SEAMS" AND "SINKING UNDER THE WEIGHT OF ITS OWN INEPTITUDE" WITH NO ONE "READY, WILLING OR ABLE TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE." A PROVINCE EDITORIAL OF NOVEMBER 12 GOES SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT "IT'S DIFFICULT NOT TO BELIEVE THAT MR. TRUDEAU'S STYLE OF GOVERNMENT IS ONE OF THE CAUSES OF QUEBEC'S DISSATISFACTION. IT CERTAINLY CANNOT BE THE SOLUTION." IN THE SAME VEIN, BRUCE HUTCHISON, THE VANCOUVER SUN'S HIGHLY REGARDED EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, STATED IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAT "IN THE NATION'S CRISIS HIS (TRUDEAU) ELOQUENT RHETORIC AND UNEQUALLED PRESTIGE ARE INADEQUATE WEAPONS." TO THESE WEAPONS, HUTCHISON COMMENTED, TRUDEAU HAS ADDED "A TYPICAL CANADIAN INITIATIVE...A NEW TASK FORCE ON NATIONAL UNITY."

3. APART FROM SOME INITIAL UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY (SEE REF B), NEITHER THE TASK FORCE, WHICH HAS NOT YET HELD ITS HEARINGS IN B.C., NOR THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL UNITY REFERENDUM HAS RECEIVED MUCH CRITICAL ATTENTION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA. HOWEVER, DURING A TRUDEAU-BENNETT MEETING IN VICTORIA ON NOVEMBER 1, THE B.C. PREMIER DID SAY HIS INITIAL OBJECTIONS ("IT WOULD ONLY TELL US

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WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW") WERE RESOLVED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S EXPLANATION THAT A REFERENDUM COULD BE HELD SOLELY INSIDE QUEBEC, ALLOWING OTTAWA TO WORD THE "SEPARATISM-OR-STAY" QUESTION. FOLLOWING THIS SAME MEETING, PREMIER BENNETT REITERATED HIS SUPPORT FOR A "FIVE-REGION" CANADA CONCEPT IN WHICH THE PROVINCES WOULD BE GIVEN A GREATER SAY IN MATTERS THAT AFFECT THEM.

4. PREMIER BENNETT, WITH SEEMINGLY LITTLE IF ANY SUPPORT FROM OTHER PROMINENT BRITISH COLUMBIANS, RETURNS REPEATEDLY TO THE THEME THAT THE KEY TO THE UNITY PROBLEM IS ECONOMIC. IN A NOVEMBER 23 KEYNOTE SPEECH TO THE SOCRD PARTY CONVENTION, BENNETT SAID EVEN A HEALTHY B.C. COULD NOT SURVIVE ON ITS OWN AND THAT A COMPULSORY NATIONAL ECONOMIC PLANNING PROCESS BINDING ON ALL CANADIAN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS WAS ESSENTIAL. HE SAID (NAIVELY IN OUR OPINION) QUEBEC SHOULD NOT OBJECT TO HIS ECONOMIC IDEAS BECAUSE IT TOO IS WORRIED ABOUT ITS ECONOMY AND EVEN IF QUEBEC SEPARATED IT WOULD HAVE TO RELY ON A HEALTHY CANADA.

5. IN AN ASTOUNDINGLY FRANK EXPRESSION OF VIEWS

BEFORE A HARVARD UNIVERSITY SEMINAR IN MID-OCTOBER, B.C. LIBERAL LEADER GORDON GIBSON FLATLY STATED THE POTENTIAL FOR QUEBEC'S SECESSION "IS VERY REAL" AND "THE CONTINUATION OF A CANADA SOMEWHAT AS WE KNOW IT TODAY, OVER A PERIOD OF GREATER THAN SAY THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS, IS DEFINITELY IN QUESTION." HE EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT A "BOLD FEDERAL INITIATIVE" IS "UNLIKELY TO COME UNTIL WE ARE SO CLOSE TO THE CRISIS OF SEPARATION THAT MOST CANADIANS WILL BE PERSUADED

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THAT THEY ARE GOING TO HAVE TO ACCEPT SOME KIND OF NEW DEAL OR SEE THE END OF THEIR COUNTRY." GIBSON ATTRIBUTED THE DELAY IN FEDERAL ACTION TO A LACK OF AGREED DEFINITION ON WHAT A NEW FORM OF CONFEDERATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE OR WHETHER THE STATUS QUO SHOULD BE MAINTAINED. HE ARGUED THAT THIS CONFUSION AND DEBATE GIVES WESTERN CANADA AN OPPORTUNITY TO SURFACE ITS OWN LEGITIMATE COMPLAINTS (ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGES AND LACK OF INFLUENCE IN OTTAWA) AND "TO REQUEST AND REQUIRE A BETTER DEAL FOR ITS CITIZENS."

6. COMMENT: IT SEEMS TO US THAT GIBSON, A POPULAR, ARTICULATE AND AMBITIOUS YOUNG LIBERAL, HAS TAKEN A RISKY STANCE ON THE QUEBEC ISSUE CONSIDERING HIS POTENTIAL FOR ADVANCEMENT IN FEDERAL POLITICS. HE RECENTLY TOLD OUR BPAO THAT HIS SPEECH AT HARVARD HAD NOT BEEN CLEARED IN ADVANCE AND THAT HE HAS HAD NO REACTION FROM PM TRUDEAU, ALTHOUGH HE EXPECTS HE MAY RECEIVE ONE AT HIS NEXT MEETING IN OTTAWA. HE FURTHER STATED HE HAD ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO RATE SEPARATION

AS AT LEAST A 50/50 CHANCE BUT HAD SECOND THOUGHTS IN  
THE FINAL DRAFT.

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7. IN REVIEWING BRITISH COLUMBIA SENTIMENTS OVER THE  
PAST YEAR SINCE THE PARTI QUEBECOIS ELECTION VICTORY,  
WE DETECT A VERY SUBTLE SHIFT IN MOOD FROM ONE OF  
COMPLACENCY AND EVEN CONFIDENCE THAT CONFEDERATION WILL  
REMAIN INTACT TO AN UNDERLYING APPREHENSION THAT QUEBEC  
WELL MAY DECIDE ITS ASPIRATIONS CAN ONLY BE MET THROUGH  
SOVEREIGNTY. LUPPI

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